Reconstruction in Otsuchi and the other municipalities after the East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami leads to the development of the Child Friendly Cities Initiative in Japan.

In March 2011, a massive earthquake and tsunami rocked Japan. The Japan Committee for UNICEF (JCU) took this opportunity to help the towns affected by the disaster to “build back better”.

In the town of Otsuchi (Iwate Prefecture) four primary schools and one junior high school were destroyed by the tsunami and a fire. A plan was made to rebuild the primary schools and junior high school as one single integrated structure that was more resilient that its predecessors.

Fifth grade elementary school students were asked to propose ideas for their new school through workshops entitled “Future Classroom” held in 2012 and supported by the JCU. A report on the initiative, including the voices of children was presented to the Otsuchi Town Government in March 2013.

The Otsuchi Board of Education was enthusiastic about incorporating the ideas proposed by the children in the design of the building. “We really hope to reflect the children’s ideas in the design specification document.” said the superintendent of the Otsuchi Board of Education.

The report was included as a reference document in the public call for design proposals for the integrated school in the spring of 2013. The architects selected to design the school sought and received advice from the JCU on how to incorporate the ideas put forth by the children in their design.
The construction of the school began in 2014 and was completed in 2016. Children that participated in the “Future Classroom” workshops are proud to have been a part of rebuilding their school and positively contributing to their community.

This experience inspired the JCU to start the Child Friendly Cities Initiative in Japan.